



Cambridge Gas Works 1959 – 228.95

Cambridge GAS Chronicle, compiled by Mike Petty

1896

1896 11 13

Serious gas explosion, Park Street [1.3]

1897

1897 carbonising & purification plants enlarged at cost of £10,000

1898

1898

Pre-payment meter introduced, consumers provided with a cooker on loan & 30 feet of service pipe free of charge. Heating stove also available for hire

1898 10 11

Thrifty wives, hopeful maidens, and even thoughtless bachelors assembled in large numbers when an exhibition under the auspices of the Cambridge University and Town Gas Light Company was opened. Some disappointment was occasioned by the announcement that Miss Richmond would not be able to give her lecture owing to the fact that her cooking utensils had not arrived, but as a solace a male assistant gave an illustration of how a bachelor's breakfast could be cooked in 12 minutes on one burner, and with a very small expenditure of gas. An attractive feature of the show is the penny in the slot cookers. These should prove a boon to the working classes, a single penny releasing enough gas to keep a single burner alight for 5½ hours 1898 10 1

1899

1899

Act extends area supplied

1900

1900

Consumption up to 255 million cubic feet

1904

1904 02 10

A clay gas pipe has been dug up in Newmarket Road. It is probably one of those used when coal gas was first introduced to Cambridge about 1836. Previous to this oil gas was manufactured by John Grafton from works in Staffordshire Street and found considerable favour with inhabitants until about 1830. Six years later he began to manufacture coal gas; there were only two small gas holders and by 1848 only 400 street lamps. Now the Cambridge Gas Company supplies 1,160 public lamps in the town alone. 04 12 10

1904 12 10

"It used to be the common opinion that electric light would entirely supersede gas but actual experience has exposed that fallacy"; Gas Company maintain mantles at bare cost & supply appliances on deferred payment scheme - up to £300 payable by instalments [1.10]

1905

1905

Further modifications to plant, 11,095 cubic feet of gas produced from one ton of coal

1906

1906 02 07

Most people have seen gas works and will remember the great gaping mouths of the retorts, belching forth hungry flames and intense heat, where perspiring half-naked men laboriously shovelled-in coal and at the end of the process raked the cokes out under even more trying conditions. They could not work many hours at a stretch and needed much beer. Contrast this with the De Bronwer method which now obtains at the Cambridge gasworks and seems marvellously simple 06 02 07 & a & b

1907

1907 01 09

A new development of gas lighting in St Andrew's Street renders the exterior of the New Theatre almost as light as day. By the use of an automatic compressor the power of ordinary incandescent light is increased fourfold but cost of the gas consumed is halved. There are two other installations in Cambridge, one in the locomotive department at the railway station and the other at Messrs Crossman's knitting factory in Norfolk Street. 07 01 09

1909

1909

Co-partnership scheme enables employees to become shareholders recreation club founded

1909 09 24

An explosion occurred at the Cambridge Gasworks on Newmarket Road. Two men working on the top of the beds of the retorts were badly cut but managed safely to descend a ladder to the ground. Covered with tar and bleeding profusely they were conveyed in a cab to Addenbrooke's Hospital. One refused to be put under chloroform whilst his injuries were dressed as that would necessitate his detention in the Hospital. CWN 09 09 24

1909 10 30

"Gas shop set out like a restaurant due to the popularity of gas for cooking; despite electricity gas continues to prosper, the great red gasometers rise up daily like red mushrooms. New showroom Sidney Street attracts great attention [1.11]

1909 11 05

The Cambridge Gas Company's Employee's Institute includes hot and cold baths, a reading-room and a large hall heated by hot water pipes making it a place where they may find healthy recreation out of working hours. The Company hope to introduce a system of co-partnership, making every employee a shareholder and giving a bonus in shares every profit-making year. CDN 09 10 26

1909 11 05

An old Fenlander walked to Cambridge seeking a good square meal. He searched a goodish few streets and wandered into colleges seeking a good juicy steak. Getting desperate he noticed a shop in Sidney Street where spread out on a gleaming white tablecloth was an amplitude of appetising cold viands. He entered only to emerge swearing: "That be a gas shop, and I am starving". He was right. It has been opened to demonstrate the popularity of gas for lighting, heating and cooking. CWN 09 11 05

1912

1912 01 06

Mains extended to villages around Cambridge workers laying main Huntingdon Rd find skeleton, rebury it alongside pipe [1.12]

1913

1913 09 27

Half people in old Cherry Hinton now converted to gas, new penny-in-slot meters fail to work [1.13]

1914

1914

War results in shortage of labour & women employed at gas works

1915

1915

Motor transport introduced; during War some operated by gas, supply being carried in bag fixed to roof (repeated during World War II)

1917

1917 02 14

Gas Explosion. A gas explosion under the floor of the bar of the The Jolly Butchers public house, Newmarket Road, Cambridge, caused a fire to break out on Thursday morning. The landlord, Mr. A. W. Hawes, had a narrow escape, for, although knocked down by the force of the explosion, he escaped injury. The cause of the explosion was apparently a leakage of gas, but exactly how it occurred is unknown. The gas meter was blown from its position, and three large windows and a quantity of glass in the bar were broken. The floor boards became ignited, and although the licensee took prompt action, he found it impossible to extinguish the flames with buckets of water, and so gave the alarm to the Fire Station. The firemen, with motor tender and escape, were speedily on the scene, and the fire was soon extinguished. An examination of the gas pipes failed to reveal from where the gas escaped 17 02 14 CIP0f

1919

1919 02

Supply dwindles due to coal shortage [1.4]

1920

1920

Record year consumption 540 million cubic feet

1920 04 20

Gas Company workmen return from war – Ch 20 04 14c

1921

1921

Gas charged by therm rather than 1,000 cubic feet

1921 06 21

Gas Company war memorial unveiled – 21 06 29c; photos 21 07 27a

1923

1923

'Regulo' controlled ovens appear; major rebuilding, including new coke handling plant

1924

1924 03 28

Six men were injured at the Cambridge University and Tow Gas Works this morning. It appears that 16 men were engaged in the oxide of iron purifier, when an explosion occurred. Oxide of iron is used in the manufacture of coal gas, and after having been in use is revived by the generation of heat. The explosion was followed by a fire. It was found necessary to send for the Dennis motor engine so that water could be pumped from the river 24 03 28

1927

1927 10

New monster gasholder - largest in East Anglia [1.5]

1929

1929

Coldham's Lane railway sidings (constructed 1867) increased to 2© acres & rotary wagon tippler installed; by 1949 handle 1,500 tons a week

1930

1930

New plant introduced throughout decade

1931

1931 05 01

Mr J.W. Autherlonie, manager of the Cambridge University and Town Gas Light Company since 1902 has seen many changes. During the Great War 70 women worked there, doing exactly the same hard tasks as the absent men. But on the return of the men they retired and today only one is engaged in this capacity. Eighteen of the employees fell and the war memorial, placed in a garden surrounding the works, is counted amongst the best of its type. 31 05 01a

1932

1932

Mains extended to Cottenham & Milton

1933

1933

New plant means that ammoniacal liquor no longer sent by barges to Kings Lynn chemical works, two gallons of benzole obtained from each ton of coal carbonized

1933 01 23

A house in Parkside was severely damaged when an explosion, suspected to have been caused by gas, blew out almost the whole of the front upper part of the building. There was a flash, followed by a tremendous explosion and the wall appeared to be driven across the road. James Langdale, heedless of danger, broke in the front door and searched for the old lady inside. He found her on the top landing, terribly injured with her clothing alight. 33 01 23 & a & b was first house to be building bordering Parkers Piece

1933 01 25

Parkside gas explosion – inquest - 33 01 25; cause of gas explosion – 33 01 31 & a

1933 03 20

Gas exhibition – ‘housewives wonder’ – 33 03 20

1934

1934 08 10

James William Auchterlonie was for over 30 years manager and engineer of the Cambridge Town & University Gas Light Company during which the annual output has risen three-fold. He was responsible for the adoption of a co-partnership scheme by which employees as well as shareholders enjoy a proportion of the profits. After the war he received Government recognition for his services in connection with the supply of high explosives. His loss will be keenly felt in Masonic and Rotarian circles 34 08 10

1935

1935

Authorised to extend mains to further 11 villages including Coton, Waterbeach & Willingham

1936

1936 11 09

Gas demonstration platform at Premier Hall, Union Lane – photo – 36 11 09

1937

1937

The Cambridge Gas Bulletin started

1937 01 15

The head offices and showroom of the Cambridge University and Town Gas Light Company in Sidney Street, where all the most modern and efficient appliances for heating, cooking, refrigeration and lighting can be seen, were built in 1909. Today the total number of consumers is in the region of 25,000. Recently the villages of Willingham, Longstanton and Oakington were supplied with gas and mains are being laid to Sawston. 37 01 15b

1939

1939 02 24

University Gas Light Company install new carbonising plant – 39 02 24a

1939 12 22

Petrol rationing is focussing attention on town gas as an alternative fuel for motor vehicles. One of the Cambridge University and Town Gas Light Company's coke lorries has just been fitted with a gas container to enable it to run without petrol. The lorry carries enough gas for 11 or 12 miles, which is adequate for deliveries of coke in the district. The range could be extended by putting a second bag on the trailer CDN 39 12 22

1941

1941

New plant produces 40 tons of crude tar a day.

1942

1942

During war make hydrogen for barrage balloons

1942 04 04

Gas Works tar storage tank catches fire, two men die – 42 04 04b

1945

1945 06 27

Cambridge and the balloon barrage: war work at the Gas Works – were 2,400 balloons. In 1940 supply of hydrogen became difficult and Cambridge approached as to facilities available such as blue water gas and steam or existing plant such as purifiers and gasholders. Was one of 19 sites selected and production hydrogen started early 1942, producing enough for 8,000 balloons. They brought down enemy aircraft over an East Anglian city. Output increased due large number balloons required for the flying bombs. Loads of long round steel cylinders on long trailers carried them. Ascents from Midsummer Common before the last war needed gas supplied from the Newmarket Road works by a main specially aid for the purpose. Recently have made nitrogen of very high degree of purity for Air Ministry – CDN 1945 06 27

1946

1946 06 25

Gasworks explosion and fire injures seven workers – 46 06 25

1949

1949

205 miles of mains now in use Cambridge University & Town Gas Light Company nationalised under Gas Act 1948

1951

1951 06 16

Residents of Abbey Ward, Cambridge, described as “a constant menace to health” the dust which comes from the Gas Works and enters their houses. Mr W. Barling produced a sugar bag half filled with dust which he said was collected in his house in one week. Another resident said she could not put her children in a pram in the garden because of the dust. A Gas Board official said a contributory factor may have been the burning of wood owing to the shortage of coal resulting in more dust and smoke getting into the atmosphere. The works had the reputation of being one of the cleanest in the country. As soon as the gas industry was nationalised endeavours would be made to reduce the problem 51 06 16

1954

1954 08 28

Sir - The best part of our charming city of Cambridge is the Abbey Estate as during the past few weeks No.1 Retort House at the Gas Works has been out of commission. No dust; No smoke; No fumes; No hauling lumps of coke out of your eyes. All is peaceful. The old grinding noise and clattering of the elevator has stopped. Washing can be hung out free from grit and blacks and you can see the spire of St Andrew's church nestling among the trees. Delightful – but how long will it last? – J.E.S.

1955

1955 03 16

Cambridge Gas Works is progressing with its new retort house near the Newmarket Road end of River Lane. The interior of the old disused retort house has been completely demolished and the new one should be completed by 1957. Coal will then flow into the retorts through closed hoppers and the coke will be extracted already quenched, eliminating a prolific source of dust and grit which has caused complaints from nearby residents. 55 03 16c

1956

1956 03 01

A fire-eating gargantuan of a bygone era made its last journey when a steam-powered ‘Super Sentinel Wagon’ completed its last run at the end of a degrading tow from another vehicle. For the monster, which started service with the Gas Company in 1928, is no longer able to run on its own steam. It carried coal from Coldham's Lane sidings to the works but today stands in Messrs Silverman's

scrapyard in Ditton Walk awaiting the oxy-acetylene cutters which will render it a heap of metal. 56 03 01f [1.17]

1956 11 23

A Sentinel steam wagon has been recommissioned at the Cambridge Gas Works as a means of conserving petrol. It has been out of action since May when it was taken off the road because of its age. It is the only vehicle of its type now working in the country and will be used for conveying coal from the Coldham's Lane sidings to the Gas Works. 56 11 23

1957

1957 10 22

New carbonising plant installed, now entirely supplied by coal gas, will ensure self-sufficiency in coke for many years [1.9, 2.1]

1959

1959 08 21

Severe damage was caused to a newly decorated house at 48 Beche Road when a gas main in the hallway blew up with tremendous force. Neighbours thought a jet bomber had crashed, so fierce was the explosion. Many people dashed into the street and saw flames bursting through the front door. The Fire Brigade could not get to the blaze until the gas company people turned off the mains. The owners had noticed a terrible smell of gas which made them feel dizzy but said the Company had been blowing out the pipes and had warned them of a smell. 59 08 21b

1961

1961 04 27

A new plant at Eastern Gas Board's works in Newmarket Road will produce gas from oil, replacing a 22-year-old retort installation which produced tar and coke as well. It will be more economical and reduce some of the dust emissions which have caused many complaints. The new plant is housed in a sound-proofed building and any surplus will be pumped into the gas grid which now covers the local area. But it will still use 400 tons of coal each day so grit will not be completely eliminated. 61 04 27 & a [2.2]

1961 09 08

Joseph Farrington has worked for the Gas Board since 1917. He operates a Super Sentinel Loco, called 'Lucy', at the Coldham's Lane depot. Every morning he gets it going on a diet of wood and coke, eases her out of her shed and down to the six trucks with which they move supplies of coal from the main railway line, depositing it in a tipper. The operation is repeated until 400 tons have been shifted. The coal is then taken up into a hopper and unloaded into a lorry which transports it to the gasworks on Newmarket Road. 61 09 08c

1961 10 26

New gas plant operates without causing dust and smoke – 61 10 26

1962

1962 01 25

Gas Board to pay cost of decontaminating River Cam after oil from the Gas works polluted the river – 62 01 25

1968

1968 03 12

North Sea gas conversion begin (Cambridge given priority because of numbers of student suicides) [1.2, 2.5]

1969

1969 06 06

Gasworks ceases production after 140 years to make way for sea gas, 60 lose jobs – 69 06 06c

1970

1970 08 17

Science laboratories devastated in big explosion laboratory on New Museums site – 70 08 17, 18;
caused by natural gas – 70 08 22

1971

1971 03 06

Fire at gas works when oil residue caught alight as workmen using acetylene torches cut metal plates
from demolished gas storage tank – 71 03 06

1971 10 08

Gas works retort house demolition – 71 10 08

1973

1973 12 13

90 foot high gas holder demolished, was erected 1908 [2.11]

1979

1979 04 03

Six miles of gas pipe replaced with plastic pipes [2.12]

1983

1983 01 10

A terraced house in Bateson Street was destroyed following a massive gas explosion in a kitchen at
the back of the house which blew out walls and windows. The occupier fled with his back in flames.
Neighbours said they had smelled gas and a service pipe to the meter inside the premises was found to
have been cut through. Council workmen demolished part of the house to make it safe. 83 01 10
[2.13]

1990

1990 06 01

Fifty families were forced to flee their homes after a gas pipe blew up in Alpha Terrace, Trumpington,
sending gas streaming into the street. Emergency teams were called and the street sealed off.
Residents were taken to the Fawcett School – 90 06 01